

August 19, 2005

The Honorable Ryan Scott Karben  
The Assembly  
State of New York  
Albany, New York 12248

Dear Mr. Karben:

On behalf of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC), I am responding to your letter dated July 19, 2005, in which you requested that the NRC conduct an investigation into the failure of the Indian Point Energy Center (IPEC) emergency siren system that occurred during the early morning hours of July 19. Entergy Nuclear Operations (Entergy), the IPEC licensee, notified the NRC of this event later that morning. On the same day, NRC inspectors confirmed that Entergy had taken immediate actions to restore the emergency siren system to operation.

The July 19 event was initiated by the loss of normal power to the Indian Point siren actuation transmitter. The backup diesel generator automatically started and continued to power the transmitter for several hours until the generator failed due to a water pump problem. The transmitter then continued to operate on a backup battery until the battery was exhausted. On discovery, the licensee took immediate corrective actions to restore power to the transmitter and verify siren operability. The NRC has confirmed that Entergy has repaired the backup diesel generator, installed a larger backup battery, and modified the siren system to initiate automatic notification of Entergy personnel of a major system malfunction.

The NRC is currently evaluating the July 19 event, as well as other emergency notification system issues at IPEC. The NRC will review the circumstances associated with each of the issues, and Entergy's short and long term corrective actions, to ensure that the emergency notification system for IPEC is reliable.

Consistent with the design of the emergency notification system for IPEC, had it been necessary to activate the IPEC emergency sirens during the period that the transmitter was inoperable, the lack of expected feedback signals from the sirens would have alerted local authorities that the system had failed. In accordance with existing procedures, the local authorities would then implement backup route alerting. Route alerting is an approved backup system in the event any of the IPEC sirens fail to operate. Backup route alerting is routinely used by emergency services organizations across the country to alert the public to a wide variety of emergency conditions, often without the advantage of pre-planned routes and procedures that exist for IPEC.

Pursuant to Section 651(b) of the recently enacted Energy Policy Act of 2005, the NRC will require Entergy to provide backup power to the emergency notification system, including the emergency siren warning system, for its Indian Point facility. As you may also be aware, Entergy announced in a news release on July 28, 2005, that it will install backup power for all of its 156 sirens within the IPEC 10-mile emergency planning zone. The improvements made by the licensee in response to the failure of normal power to the siren actuation transmitter and the planned installation of backup power for the 156 sirens should result in improved reliability of the IPEC emergency notification system.

Maintaining the capability for promptly alerting the public of an emergency at a nuclear power plant is more than a regulatory requirement; it is also an important complement to the protections provided by the safe design, construction, and operation of these facilities. The NRC appreciates and shares your strong interest in protecting the citizens who live in the communities surrounding the IPEC.

Sincerely,

**/RA/**

Nils J. Diaz